



the faculty of music
university of toronto

in co-operation with
the canadian broadcasting corporation

presents

YO-YO MA

cello

Samuel Sanders

piano

macmillan theatre,
edward johnson building

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 1978

8:30 p.m.



PROGRAM

Pièces en Concert

François Couperin

Prélude

Sicilienne

La Tromba

Plainte

Air de diable

This suite is an arrangement by the French cellist Paul Bazelaire of movements from the chamber music of François Couperin Le Grand. This Couperin, the most famous member of a distinguished musical dynasty was born in 1668 and died in 1733. From 1693 he was employed by Louis XIV as composer and performer and it is clear that from about 1700 onwards he was virtually in charge of music at the French court even though the official Ordinaire de la Musique was d'Angelbert. Among Couperin's duties was the provision of music for the concerts du dimanche and some of the movements being played tonight were probably first performed among the splendours of Versailles.

The music is of an engaging simplicity and detailed analysis is completely unnecessary. The Prélude is a slow, noble movement with a beautifully lyrical melody for the soloist delicately ornamented in the French manner. The Sicilienne, with its gently dotted rhythm, has a pastoral character which calls to mind the contemporary paintings of Watteau. The Plainte is a ternary movement with the outside sections being a mournful lament; the sorrowful nature of this section is emphasized by the way in which the melodic line continually circles around a limited number of notes. The suite ends with a lively Allegro which, in spite of its title, contains little that anyone but the most timid would consider satanic.

Sonata in C. Op. 65

Benjamin Britten

Dialogo

Scherzo — pizzicato

Elegia

Marcia

Moto Perpetuo

In a notable speech which Britten made in 1964 he said that he wrote music for human beings — “directly and deliberately” and that he took into consideration the human circumstances of music, its environment and conventions. “Almost every piece I have ever written has been composed with a certain occasion in mind, and usually for definite performers, and certainly always *human* ones.” This sonata is a case in point; it stems from Britten's association with the great Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, an association which led to such compositions as the three cello suites and the Symphony for cello and orchestra. The sonata, which inaugurated this series of works, was completed at Aldeburgh in 1961 and given its first performance at the Aldeburgh Festival that year by Rostropovich and the composer.

The lucid communication of his musical thoughts was of obvious importance to Britten; “it is insulting to address anyone in a language that he does not understand”. This particular comment was made with respect to the texts of choral

works but it might equally apply to Britten's musical language. Most listeners will agree that he took his self-imposed duty "to speak to, or for his fellow human beings" with seriousness and sincerity; those who are only acquainted with his vocal works will find in this sonata the same originality and clarity of speech. The textures are of incredible transparency, the gestures at times almost laconic and, although making technical demands of both performers, virtuosity for its own sake is completely lacking.

The first movement begins, quietly, almost tentatively with two ideas which will prove to be of great importance as the movement unfolds; the piano chords rising and descending by step and the cello's insistence on the motive of a second. This cello motive develops into a theme of driving force and the exposition closes with a tranquil statement of the piano chords, now transformed into rising and falling segments of a whole-tone scale. It is relatively easy to follow these ideas through the remainder of the movement.

In the second movement, (the cello playing pizzicato throughout) the motive of a second is expanded into ascending and descending thirds. The central section employs a typically Brittenesque ostinato with the cello repeating a pattern of open fifths and the left hand of the piano part exploring variations of the scalar ideas from the first movement. These scale segments are taken up later by the cello in three and four note chords.

The title of the third movement conveys the character exactly. The opening cello theme is constructed with marvellous economy, exploiting the distinctive timbre of the middle range of the instrument and this same mood returns at the conclusion of the movement. In between, the piano climbs slowly, accompanied by chords for the cello, burgeoning into an elaborately ornamented melody in the upper reaches of the keyboard.

Peter Evans has suggested that the "nightmare distortion of the main theme" in the March was conceived as a tribute to the "musical satire of Prokofiev or early Shostakovich". In this movement the underlying unifying principle of the whole sonata is less obvious to the listener. Britten himself said of the last movement: "the 6/8 *Saltando* theme dominates the entire movement, frequently changing its character, now high and expressive, now low and grumbling, now gay and carefree." In other words, the music speaks for itself!

INTERMISSION

Seven Variations on "Bei Männern, welche Liebe fühlen"
from Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute*.

Beethoven

Beethoven wrote two sets of variations for cello and piano on themes from Mozart's *Magic Flute*, a work which he considered to be that composer's greatest opera. According to Thayer this set was probably written at the beginning of 1801 and was published without an opus number by Mollo in 1802. The variations are dedicated to Count Johann Georg von Browne-Camus, a somewhat unstable character who was employed by Catherine II in the Russian Imperial Service. Little is known of him beyond the fact that Beethoven dedicated four works to him, including the Op. 9 string trios, and three to his wife, the Countess Browne: Beethoven's reward for the dedication of one of the latter works was the gift of a

horse; it is not recorded what he received for the cello variations.

Whatever Beethoven may have thought of The Magic Flute as an opera his choice in this case was dictated by the simplicity of the theme; it is that very simplicity which makes the process of variation possible. If anyone should doubt that just consider what Beethoven was able to do with Diabelli's miserable tune. The theme is laid out clearly with an alternation between piano and cello for the inner repeats of the melody. This same alternation is often carried through into the variations; thus in the first variation the cello leads with the first limb of the tune and the piano provides the repeat whilst in the second, fourth and sixth variations the piano opens with a highly decorated version of the theme. In this way Beethoven solves the delicate problem of balance between the cello and piano. By way of contrast Beethoven uses a common ploy: the fourth variation is set in the minor mode and the penultimate variation is an elaborately textured Adagio.

Sonata in D minor Op. 108 (Originally for violin and piano)

Allegro
Adagio

Brahms
(transcribed by Mr. Ma)

Un poco presto e con sentimento
Presto agitato

During the three years 1886-8 Brahms spent the summer months in the Swiss town of Thun. The idyllic surroundings seem to have stimulated his imagination since each visit resulted in the production of at least one major work; the first year the F major cello sonata, the A major violin sonata and the C minor piano trio, the following year the magnificent double concerto for violin and cello and in the third summer this violin sonata. We hear it tonight in an arrangement for cello and piano.

The first movement is in a regular sonata form with a wealth of interesting thematic material. The most obvious themes are the long opening string melody with its syncopated piano accompaniment and the main portion of the second subject which is announced by the piano alone. The working out of this material is concise, much of its great strength coming from the fact that the development is built over a dominant pedal. This harmonic insistence is balanced by the tonic pedal of the coda.

The Adagio poses few problems. Frau von Herzogenberg had the following interesting comment to make in a letter to Brahms: "I noticed with pleasure that the beautifully devotional Adagio is not interrupted by an Intermezzo; for which, however good it may be, I can never feel a welcome. Such contrasts always appear to me to be artificial, and continuity of sentiment in a slow movement to be far more enjoyable."

The third movement is a light-hearted scherzo, although Brahms does not label it as such, and the final movement is a cross between a sonata and a rondo. This last movement has an air of wild abandon, the opening subject reminding the good Frau von Herzogenberg of "Aurora strewing flowers before the chariot of the god of the sun".

Program Notes by Stanford Miles